EXPERIENCES IN THURSTON COUNTY JAIL

AND

THOUGHTS TOWARDS TEARING THE MOTHER FUCKER DOWN

Text by Anonymous
Formatted by Fugitive Distro
Typeset in BEBAS and Verina Serif

> “Prison is the most direct, brutal expression of power, and like power it must be destroyed, it cannot be abolished progressively. Anyone who thinks they can improve it now in order to destroy it in the future will forever be a captive of it.
>
> The revolutionary project of anarchists is to struggle along with the exploited and push them to rebel against all abuse and repression, so also against prison. What moves them is the desire for a better world, a better life with dignity and ethic, where economy and politics have been destroyed. There can be no place for prison in that world.”
>
> - Alfredo Bonanno, Locked Up

I’ve spent a fair amount of time in and out of Thurston County Jail in various capacities – in jail, in the work release annex, on Electronic Home Monitoring – as we all as even longer tied up in the Thurston County criminal-legal system and I want to spend some time talking about my experience with the jail, it’s centrality in everything we are fighting against and some thoughts on how to tear the motherfucker down. The jail is always something that’s looming over us, but there’s almost no actual anarchist writing on the jail – I think partially because it’s out of sight and partially we’ve generally lost sight of the importance of analysis and historical record in long term struggle. This is my modest contribution.

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

The first step towards jail is going through the court system, as I only have experience with the county felony court system, that’s what I’ll talk about. It is designed to be isolating and individualizing by intention. For my initial charge – that was dropped and refiled as a felony – I was barred from having contact with my co-defendants, some of them were banned from going downtown for a year. It’s all a huge pain. You’re given a public defender who’s first focus is generally to get what seems like the best outcome for you legally which might not be politically such as encouraging entering into cooperating pleas. I think because Thurston County tends to be particularly white and wealthy we have

pretty decent public defenders but even then I know of people who’s public defenders were largely absent and unhelpful.

The state will spend a lot of trying trying to paint you as some sort of danger to broader society (and to some degree would could agree – we are after all against /their/ society), they’ll try to make the case a simple case of cops and robbers – you as an individual broke the law and hurt society and must be punished for it – and other such shit. It’s all garbage that they push for their own political gains. It’s important to always remember for any criminal proceedings – whether ‘political’ or not (a distinction I don’t like to make) – their primary goal isn’t an impartial law and order but is broadly a political maneuver to reinforce the state’s domination and build ‘consensus’ through sheer awe of power.

Secondly and on an individual level, prosecutors are looking to get easy wins to advance their careers so a lot of this is set up to scare you into taking pleas for things that you could easily win in trial. The whole process is drawn out, confusing, and fatiguing and that was with an incredibly and dedicated support team. It’s probably much worse for the many people without one. Simply wanting to be done with it makes you want to take a plea. Then the sentencing is set up as a variable, from minimum to maximum sentence and fines and they wave this over you to scare you and make you think if you don’t take the plea you’ll get the maximum. Oftentimes you’ll also be charged with a bunch of shit that won’t stick and will get dropped later to make you think you’re in a worse situation than you are. My lawyer told me that they really don’t like giving people jury trials and will punish people who go to trial and lose with harsher sentences.

And on top of all that other shit you might have to spend some or all of the time in jail if you can’t pay bail – a straight up punishment for being poor – or they refused to give you bail.

It’s a fucking rigged game.

I can’t talk about trial because I ended up taking a plea – not the initial one they gave me. I came to court and packed the room with all my supporters and my lawyer told them to give me a better plea or we’d go to trial. They capitulated. Again, it’s important to stress how few people can pack a room with supporters and how worse off they are for it. Though on the flip side of that, packing the court room can also piss off the judge and lead to harsher sentencing down the line. You gotta do some cost-benefit analysis here.

I regret taking the plea though, I think I could have won at trial and now I’m stuck as a felon which means I lose my voting rights (which I don’t care about), I lose my gun rights and can’t petition to get them back for 5 years. Being a felon makes getting a job and housing incredibly difficult in good times and near impossible in a place with a near non-existent job market and rapid gentrification. It’s fine for me because I’ve spent my life avoiding work anyway, but for most people who aren’t anarchists – and even many who are – what this essentially does is creates a semi-permanent underclass of criminalized people to fund the county. They get money from the fucking extortionist court fees for every fucking thing, as well as counties get funding for jail population. Prisoners are literally a cash crop for counties and Thurston County has been for years increasing its policing apparatus, increasing its jail capacity, and especially now with a skyrocketing homeless population that is essentially breaking the law by living and surviving.

It’s worth taking a little side note here to remember that wealth isn’t made but extracted. Every place that is wealthy also has a bigger and bigger homeless population – Seattle, Portland, LA, San Francisco, NYC, Chicago – because wealth is extracted from more and more people who can then no longer afford to live there. We can see this process happening in real time in Olympia. This assures a rotating jail population which will mean more funding for the county which will mean an expansion of policing and jail. We cannot reconcile the “rights” of the rich and landed to extract

wealth from our lives with our alleged “right” to live and survive and thrive. The only way to change this situation is class war – the immediate expropriation and redistribution of land and wealth by force.

THURSTON COUNTY JAIL

You enter into a small room where you’re held up against a wall by 3 or 4 guards who pat down and grope you. Always a humiliating and dehumanizing experience. For people who are in and out they get ‘used’ to this, conditioned to a total loss of control over access to their bodies. Then you’re ushered into an ugly ass waiting room where you wait for what seems like forever. If there are others around you can’t talk to each other. Sometimes there is a TV playing. You get called over and they do your intake paperwork, then they take your mugshot. If you try to smile they’ll threaten to taze you – they get total control to display you as you want. I proudly asked for a copy of of my mugshot to which they confusingly denied. Then they usher you over to take your finger prints, send you to go change in to the god awful blue or orange scrubs that never fit right, then they lead you to whichever block they decide to put you in. You walk in, on one side is a guard desk facing out, on the other is all the beds lined up. There are windows from the guards desk into the bathroom. There is no privacy. You look up and wayyy at the top of the room there are tiny windows that let in a little amount of light. Across the way there is a concrete box a little bigger than a bathroom with walls as tall as the building and that’s the yard.

All the while the guards are making jokes – jokes about their power over you, various forms of racist and sexist jokes. This is a constant theme of jail, it’s an intense site of racial and gendered segregation and regimentation. Queerness is explicitly forbidden, especially in the ‘womens’ section as friends have told me. If you look trans or tell them you’re trans you will get placed in isolation “for your own protection”. Prisoners and guards alike crack jokes about faggots. It’s very much like school in the way that it crushes any forms of homosexuality or gender variance. Olympia and

Thurston County constantly go on about how they're inclusive and other such bullshit but there are no queer friendly cops, there are no queer friendly jails. We always have to remember that gender segregation is not the defense of some biological fact but first and foremost and ideological weapon. Same with a confining space that reproduces sexist, racist behavior, and abuse of power – as every position of power creates. So ultimately what we get is people rotating in and out of this space where these behaviors are encouraged and rewarded and then get back outside where they reproduce them. Jail is the linchpin of civil society. If we want to destroy white supremacy, misogyny, transphobia, gender regimentation, hierarchical relations we need to attack them at the point of reproduction – jails and prisons.

All that said, while it's culturally awful and some people are giant assholes, most people inside are pleasant. Everyone just wants to get through it and get out. I've met some interesting people – some that I've met again on the out side, some that I met again in jail at a different time that was funny, unexpected and ultimately sad.

So you sit there in this dingy concrete room, you read shitty books – they don't allow new books in anymore because multiple people have OD'd or died from withdraw in jail and they decided drugs were coming in via books – you talk with the others, and you're on a tightly regimented schedule.

You wake up early as fuck to some asshole yelling, get in line for some fucking disgusting food (courtesy of Aramark who also serve the Evergreen State College), then you kill time till about noon where some asshole orders you back to your bunks while they get lunch, some asshole tells you its lunchtime and you line up for some more nearly inedible garbage, then you kill time again til about 6 where you do the same song and dance for some disgusting dinner, kill time to about 8 or 9ish then its lights out.

Wash – rinse – repeat.

It's a strict regimentation on a work schedule because ideally if you obediently jump through all the hoops and get through the shit they throw at you to make you fail then you come out an obedient worker for their economy. Otherwise you are being trained to obey and go through the motions so you don't become a problem while they hold you captive.

And once you're out, maybe thats it, or maybe you have fines to pay, or probation where you have to report to a P.O. and release condition. And it's worth mentioning because I don't think many know this but the probation office – or Community Corrections Office as it's disgustingly known – is downtown across the street from the city jail and court at 715 8th Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98504. When you're on probation you're no longer managed by city or county but are now DOC property. The conditions of probation are rigid with no flexibility which makes them unsuited for poor people who generally live chaotic lives. It's set up in a way to make you fail and go back in.

"OPTIONS"

If you're lucky, have money and a job, you can be given the 'option' of 'alternatives to incarceration'. These are work release and electronic home monitoring or EHM. I want to talk about these 'alternatives' for a moment because in many places, especially "progressive" places like Thurston County there is more of a move away from traditional incarceration towards these 'softer' forms of incarceration. But a chain is still a chain even if it's a little longer and these are not removing prisons but spreading it over the whole social territory. More and more people are on parole or probation where they are constantly monitored – who they know, what they do, where they are – and jail or prison is always looming over them. Electronic Home Monitoring turns your own home into a jail and again with physical jail looming over. For work release you're still in jail but let out to go to work – their ideal form of world.

Even outside of this more and more people are being diagnosed with mental illness and more and more laws are being made to control those with diagnoses. You can still be forcefully institutionalized or given the option to ‘voluntarily’ institutionalize yourself or be forcefully institutionalized (a form of incarceration). More and more kids are thrown in to youth jails (there is one right next to the county jail), assigned a truancy officer as a form of youth probation or even put on electronic monitoring for truancy. More and more cops in schools which are already – organizationally and architecturally – like prisons. More and more cops are in hospitals, people who are injured by police are chained to their beds and watched over by pigs. Homeless non-profits have forcefully institutionalized people and counted it as housing them to keep their numbers up (shout out to Olympia Mutual Aid Partners you sick fucks), more vagrancy, loitering and anti-social behavior laws are popping up to criminalize more and more people for existing in the increasingly shrinking public space. More cameras are going up everywhere, surely you’ve noticed the many surveillance towers going up with their annoying blinking blue lights and loud speakers that assure us its for our security.

Less and less can you talk of jail and prison as a distinct place because more and more jail and prison is a condition of every day life.

But I digress, let’s talk specifically about these ‘options’. I was supposed to go on house arrest and to qualify you need a job. I didn’t have a job at the time but a sympathetic business owner was going to take me on as an employee but let me do whatever basically. Unfortunately their business wasn’t licensed or something to have employees so when I went in to get on EHM I was instead taken into jail and placed in the Work Release annex. I had to arbitrarily sit in there for a month before I was allowed to look for a job – even though I already had a job lined up thanks to friends.

I want to again point out that Work Release and EHM are set up for labor regimentation – making good workers for their world. Many of the people in the work release annex work in the warehouses and distribution centers out in Lacey which is the economic heart of Thurston County. Without this coerced labor the county would grind to a halt.

It’s also worth pointing out again that I had a lot of support that others don’t have – people were sending me letters, zines, and books – all of which you can no longer physically get but is now digitized and sent to your telmate account which costs money to access - putting money on my commissary, constantly hounding the guards about my condition and how they can help me. On that point there were continually told that they shouldn’t be helping me and that I had to deal with this myself, again the system is designed to isolate and individualize – to cut off from any collective support.

The work release annex is much….I hate to use the word but “nicer” than the main jail. There are no windows to the bathroom, the guards aren’t immediately inside the area but of course there are cameras everywhere and the guards are in a center room next door. There are big windows where you could see outside and there was a fenced in backyard area you could go and while there wasn’t a lot of privacy in the bunks they were walled off from other bunk sections. You can also wear your street clothes, though I wasn’t supposed to because of my weird status but I did anyway because fuck ‘em.

During my time there I day dreamed about going to the outside area, climbing the fence and running off. I always regret that I never did. A few people went out to work and never returned. Some were caught, some weren’t. Good for them!

I think maybe the day after I got in there was a noise demo for me. A large group of people all in black were up on the hill and jumping on the fence waving in to me and everyone who came to look out the window, they made a shit

ton of noise and I can’t remember if there were fireworks or not. It was maybe all of 5 minutes but had a special place in my heart, plus gave me the opportunity to talk to people in there about anarchy and the abolition of jails. The work release annex is unfortunately the only place you can really see noise demos from, in the rest of the jail you probably won’t hear them unless they’re /really/ loud, and maybe you’ll see the lights from fireworks shot over the jail. I remember when I initially got arrested there was a noise demo for me but I slept through it and everyone thought that was really funny. But most noise demos target the work release annex, to really get the others there needs to be a lot more preparation done.

There isn’t much more to really say about work release, it’s basically the same as regular jail. You sit and wait but also go to work. Towards the end there was a moment where my partner was in the guard area arguing with the guards about something and for some reason the door was propped open and we had a really great but brief moment of seeing and waving to each other. The guard was so pissed and hurried to shut the door. At another point when I was on my way back to the jail with a friend after going out to get my job we stopped and took a selfie in front of a mailbox numbered 1312. It’s the little things like that that really keep you going in jail.

Then finally I was on Electronic Home Monitoring. This shit is such a scam, it was like 120$ a month. You have to pay for your own fucking incarceration! And if you don’t pay, back to jail! Again this shit is a poverty tax and if you don’t got money or a support network – like most people don’t – then you’re fucked! But you get this piece of shit anklet attached to you and you can’t leave your house except for work and once a week to get groceries. Everywhere you go, you call them and tell them you’re leaving, call them when you arrive. You can’t be outside, if you want to take out your garbage, you have to call them. You have to report once a week on a random day to get piss tested – another humiliating experience. If they need you to call them or if the battery gets low the thing will vibrate. For months after I felt

ghost vibrations and freaked the fuck out. If you miss any of it it's back to jail. It really makes you no longer feel safe in your home, because now your home is jail.

This was probably the roughest part to get support for because with the others my friends and comrades were missing my presence. But for this I'm just there. I don't blame my comrades too much but support really fell through on this part. Plans we made to help pass the time fell through, friends slowly stopped checking on me. It was probably the most isolating part of the whole experience. When your friends and comrades on house arrest you have to make an extra effort to continue to show up – come hang, cook food, help with groceries, that sort of stuff.

The other big part of EHM is this is probably the part the impacted others the most. I had to tell the pigs who my housemates were and they basically had to sign away their rights of search and seizure for the time I was on EHM. Thankfully the pigs never came by, but it was for sure a point of stress. And because I couldn't drive and the bus was unreliable I had to really rely on other people for rides. I don't think anyone thought of it this way but in my mind I ended up being a burden on my friends and housemates. It's a real shitty feeling.

But that was over really quick. And I was free! Well, almost. I was on parole – or probation? I don't know the fucking difference - for I think 6 months, but I didn't really experience it because my PO didn't really want to deal with it and decided to put me on unsupervised. My not having any priors, having a supportive community, and I think being a kind of articulate person saved my ass here. This isn't the case for most people, and I imagine now that I have a felony on my record I won't get the same leniency. I know some of the conditions they can stick you with is no leaving the state or even city without permission, regular meet ups with your PO, random drug testing. Things like that.

That’s most of my experience with the criminal-legal system and jail. There are two things worth mentioning though – a lot of people who come into jail are coming down and having withdraws which puts them in an even worse situation, they often can’t comply with a lot of orders from guards and get infractions, if they’re too sick to come to court they’ll end up sitting in jail longer than they would have. Some people have died from withdraw in Thurston County Jail. Since my time you can no longer send in books, you also don’t directly get your mail anymore, instead it’s digitized and sent to your Telmate account where you have to use one of the 5 tablets shared between 30+ person block. It costs money to view your mail and to send mail. It’s not new but also worth mentioning that it also costs money to do phone calls. It’s extortion at every step.

Also my experience was pre-COVID . The jail was never good about COVID to begin with, there’s no air ventilation and it’s an inherently enclosed and packed together space, they only give you shitty medical masks and for a while it was something like one a week. There have been multiple major COVID outbreaks in the jail that also spread into the wider community. Multiple times COVID has been brought into the jail because the sheriffs don’t wear masks. The jail has shipped COVID positive prisoners to other jails. It’s probably worse now because what COVID restrictions and protections were in place the new piece of shit sheriff wants to reverse.

It’s not just in our collective self interest to destroy the jail, it is also an explicit matter of preservation of life to destroy that jail.

SOME THOUGHTS TOWARDS TEARING THE MOTHERFUCKER DOWN

When we are talking about jails and prisons we cannot /just/ talk of jails and prisons, as if we could separate them from the rest of the criminalization process or the rest of a society built upon prisons. Thus when talking about resistance to and destruction of jails and prisons we are obviously talking about insurrection and total social

revolution. But that is a huge leap from here to there so I've thought of some intermediate individual and collective actions and strategies that take place in and out of the jail and the court room. It is my hope that comrades discuss these with others and move to put them into practice.

SOME STRATEGIES FOR STRUGGLE IN THE COURTS:

Court Watch – a very simple thing to put together and it appeals to a lot of people – it gets people a first hand look at how the courts operate, the injustices of the courts, what people end up being criminalized for what things, and helps keep up with trends in criminalization. Basically you go to court, sit in for various hearings and trials, take notes, and maybe take the time to talk to various people about their cases and experiences. It's easy but requires a lot of time, people, and coordination to get going consistently but it really makes patterns apparent.

Court Support – a longstanding tradition within anarchist circles of showing up for comrades facing down the state – but it can and should be extended to people facing the brunt of social war. Most people don't have supporters who will come show up for them, we should find ways to extend that hand.

Jury Nullification – Pushing knowledge of jury nullification – which is when a jury returns a "not guilty" verdict regardless of if they believe someone broke the law. A great example of this comes from Detroit in the 70's where a man named James Johnson shot his boss at the Chrysler Factory and the jury refused to convict. This one tends to get overlooked, but a good way to measure how weak governing forces are in an area and how wide-spread militant sympathies are is how willing or unwilling juries are to convict even when there is evidence to support it. This is also why anarchists and other radicals shouldn't avoid jury duty and should do what we can to slip through the screening process.

Court Shutdowns – It's pretty easy, but also pretty illegal, to shut down a court for a day. This is a tried and true tactics for disrupting evictions as eviction court is only on Fridays. Rolling through with a crew in the morning

before courts open and chaining all the doors shut, you gotta be quick though because it’s probably less than ideal to confront the police at their courthouse.

Encouraging Jury Trials – It's obvious that the state doesn't have the resources or the desire to give everyone a jury trial even though its an alleged 'right', this is why they are so pushy with plea deals. They want quick and easy wins and are good at scaring people into them. This has some risk though, my public defender explained to me that the state doesn't like when people go to trial and tends to give them a harsher punishment if they go to trial and fail. But for those who want to try, it's a good way to slow down the operation of courts if lots of people insist on jury trial.

Case Refusal – There are a lot of ways to continually delay your case. Switching lawyers, making up circumstances for extension (oh my relative is sick/just died/etc), submitting every motion possible even if you know it will fail, challenging everything the prosecution or judge does, asking judges to remove themselves from the case, even going as far as doing things that will get you hit with criminal contempt if you're fine doing a few preemptive stints in jail. This can be done well by representing yourself, though self representation tends to be more risky but on the other hand public defenders will be hesitant to help with any of these.

Overall the goal is to slowdown, disrupt, and tie up resources of the court system so the least amount of people possible can be tried and brought into the incarceration system.

SOME STRATEGIES FOR STRUGGLE IN THE JAILS

Organizing against jails is much harder than prisons because people are only in jail for up to a year so there is no long term connections being built, but this also opens up different opportunities for locals who are pissed and want revenge to link up with us on the outside. Most people have probably either been to jail or have a friend or loved one that has been or is in jail.

Making connection with those on the inside by writing letters/sending email – Offering them court and general jail support and generally having a standing fund separate from an anarchist defense fund to send books, put money on commissary and communications etc. Communications of course are much more difficult now with the newer restrictions and costs for mail.

Noise Demos – Fireworks or loud speakers are crucial as the only place we can be seen is from the work-release annex so speakers and fireworks give us the opportunity to be seen and heard from the main cell block.

Exit Support – In the recent past some people have set up a table outside the jail during the hours in which they released people, offered them snacks, cigarettes', zines, and rides. It's been a good to meet people and talk with them about directly attacking their misery.

Spotlight – Jails in general but Thurston County Jail and it's kid prison tend to be out of the public mind. We need to do everything we can to make sure people are seeing it, thinking of it and how fucked these places are, and are seeing resistance to it and given opportunities to plug into that resistance.

EHM/Work Release Options – In most cases I loathe the idea of an anarchist business and don't think such a thing is possible, but I think it would be worthwhile for anarchists to have one or a few businesses that maybe aren't explicitly anarchist but are used by anarchists to offer people a 'job' for EHM and Work Release that's in an environment where they have maximum autonomy and can work and get paid if they want or just have us cover for them to do whatever they wanna do.

Escape – People can and have avoided capture and even escaped from jails and prisons. People escape from Coyote Ridge all the time, during the start of COVID there was a mass escape from Yakima County Jail. Just last year a hand full of kids held captive at Echo Glen Children’s Center attacked some guards, stole a car, and fled. We should encourage escape and build up networks of safe houses to help facilitate escape.

Riot – Ultimately our goal is to physically destroy the jails and prisons and free everyone locked up. The best way to do this is fermenting inside riots and supplementing them out outside riots. Unless this is happening in particularly insurrectionary times it's again important to have safe houses ready.

Conclusions

While the focus here is on the county jail it’s important for us to keep up with general changes in the jail system so it’s important to talk about the city jail. It’s currently on it’s way out, they are aiming to close it and lay off the 10 corrections staff and direct all misdemeanor cases to the Nisqually jail. I haven’t been there but what I’ve heard from people I talked to in county who have been there, as well as from friends and legal workers who are more familiar, it makes Thurston County Jail look like a fucking hotel. It would be very worth getting the stories of people from Nisqually jail to make a more complete analysis of the changing shape of the incarceration system in Thurston County and how to best tear it the fuck down.

We can engage in all sorts of intermediate struggles regarding jails, prisons, and the process of criminalization and we should, but at the end of the day if we really want to destroy prisons what it’s ultimately going to take is an inside riot combined with an outside storming of the jails – battering down the doors and fighting close quarters with the pigs to free the captives. All of the intermediate struggles we fight should be to get us closer to the end goal of physically destroying these human warehouses.

Until the last court burns, until the last prison empties and crumbles, until the last pig dies, the struggle continues….

Post-Script: Noise Demos at Thurston County Jail

There’s a long tradition of noise demos outside the jail. There are usually noise demos a few hours after comrades are arrested, there was a noise demo during the

National Prison Strikes, and there’s usually a New Years Eve noise demo. People usually walk around the whole jail, make a shit ton of noise, shoot off a fuck ton of fire works and then dip a lil before or once the pigs show up. During 2020 there were a lot of day time demos at the jail and youth jail, in one instance the flag in front of the youth jail got ripped down and burned. The last NYE Noise Demo the jail got tagged for the first time, it was also the first time I’ve heard of the sheriffs bringing out the riot dogs. But as far as I know, no one has gotten arrested at any of these, and it’s always really nice to come flex on the pigs on there turf and let the people inside know they’re not forgotten.

May the coming months and years bring even more militant demos!

A crowd shoots off fire works and takes down and burns the american flag outside the Thurston County youth jail during a 2020 Juneteenth noise demo

2016 national prison strike at the Thurston County Jail

People carrying a banner reading "FREE THEM ALL" after the 2020 NYE noise demo at the jail

fugitive distro

an invitation to revolt....
linktr.ee/fugitivedistro
fugitivedistribution@protonmail.com
fugitive.keybase.pub

FREEDOM WILL BLOSSOM FROM THE ASHES OF THE PRISONS